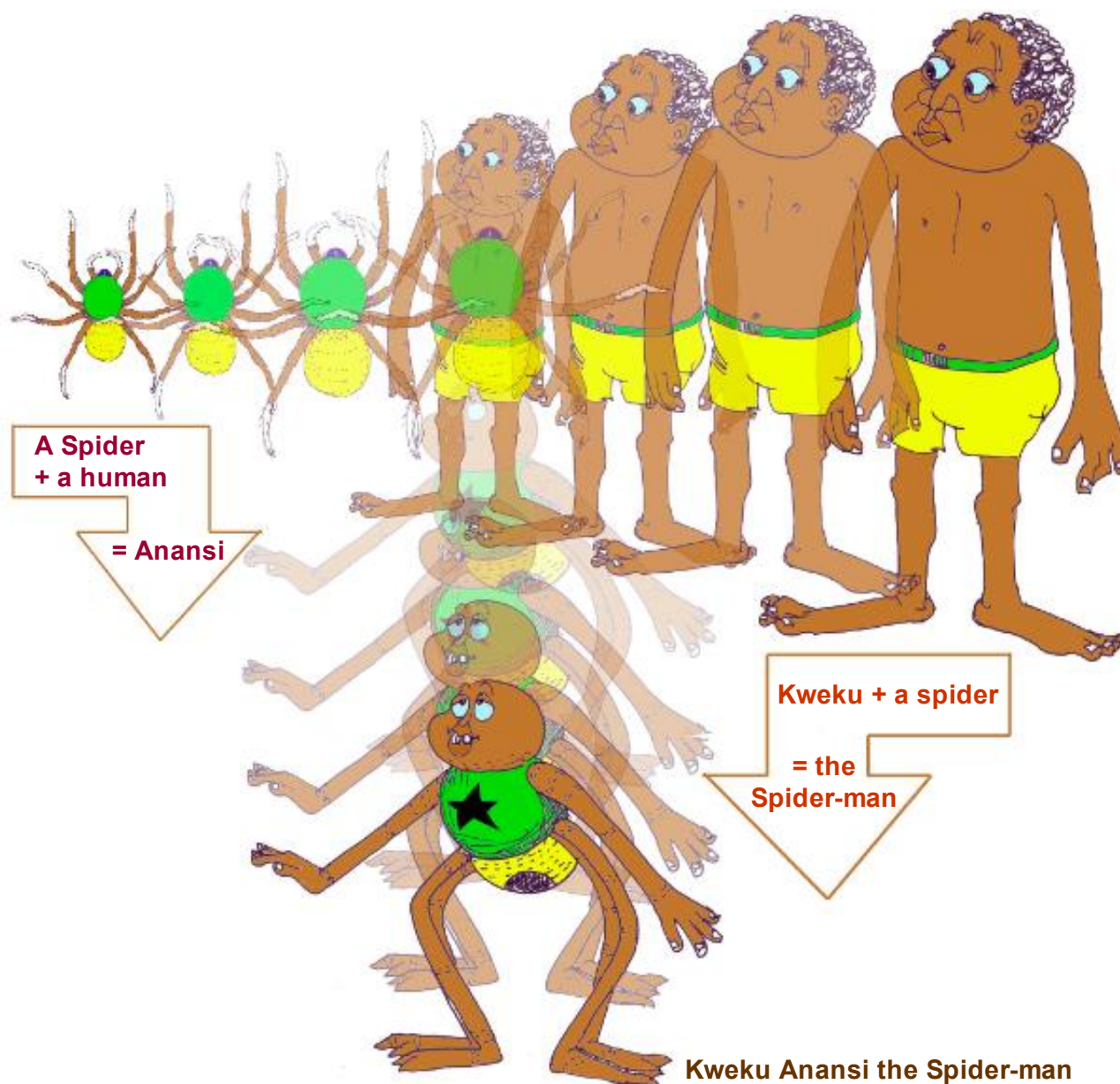


How Anansi Became A Spider

ALL YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE SPIDER-MAN:

He once enjoyed his life as a man. Nyame (N'-ya-mae), his father, changed his mischievous son into a spider. As a spider-man, Anansi continued his pranks. Through his actions we learn how to behave.



PROFILE

Given Name: Kweku Anansi

Father: Nyame, the Great Sky God

Mother: Asase Ya, Earth goddess / Goddess of Fertility

Alias(es): Ananse, from the Twi language for spider. **AKA:** Anansi / Annancy / Annansay / Annancey / Anancyi / Anawnsy / Hanansi / Hanaansi / Compe Anansi / John Anansi / Nansi / Nance / Nancy / Mr. Nancy / Brother Anansi / Bro' Anancy / Bra' Nancy / Bre-Nancy / Aunt Nancy / Miss Nancy / Anansi-Tori / Ti Malice / Uncle Bouki / The Spider / Spider-man

Gender: Male

Race: Mixed (50% negroid, 50% supernatural)

Ethnicity: Akan

Specie: Deity-homo-arachnid

Date of Birth: Unknown (around the time when animals and humans spoke to each other).

Day of Birth: Wednesday

Height: Little. **Weight:** Light.

Address(es): Kumasi, Ghana / Kingston and the counties of Jamaica and other Caribbean territories / The Sea Islands and South Carolina (Gullah), USA / The island of Haiti / Paramaribo and other districts within Suriname, South America / Garifuna Communities, Belize, Central America.

Country of Origin: Asanti, Ghana

Profession: Trickster

M.O. (Modus Operandi): Trickery; Quick-change-artist; Uses his brains; Hustler; Outsmarts persons larger than himself; Known to travel with immigrants; Often gets in trouble for a misdemeanor.

Main Enemy: Osebo the Leopard, **A.K.A:** "Bre'r Tiger", "Bra Tiger", "Bro Tiger", Tiger

History: According to the Dictionary of Jamaican English, edited by F.G. Cassidy and R. B. Le Page, Anansi is "the central character of numerous fables, West African in origin, extremely popular in Jamaica and many other parts of the West Indies. Anansi, the spider, pits his cunning (usually with success) against superior strength; he also symbolizes greed and envy." In Jamaica Talk: Three Hundred Years of the English Language in Jamaica, by Frederic G. Cassidy, Anansi "is supposed to be tongue-tied, or to lisp. He uses a form of Jamaican dialect with the most Africanisms ('Bungo talk'). For example, [Anansi] says 'yiki' for 'little'. He cannot pronounce 'r' and he speaks with a falsetto whine. If the story is well told, one knows at once when Anansi begins to speak."

Kweku Anansi (or Ananse) is the son of the Asanti (Ashanti) Supreme Being called Nyame. Nyame the great sky god, turned Anansi into a spider-man. Nyame is also called by other names. As Oboadee (Creator), Odomankoma (Infinite, Inventor), he created life and death. Once death used venom to overcome Nyame. Nyame used an antidote to combat death's venom, therefore, he has eternal life. A part of Nyame's eternal spiritual form was placed into the human soul or "kra". Therefore, this kra also cannot die. Additionally, Nyame is known as Ananse Kokuroko, which means The Great Spider or The Great Designer.

Nyame allows Anansi to bring rain, especially to quench forest fires. It is also Anansi who determines the borders of oceans and rivers when they flood. Anansi is so famous that he is credited with creating the sun, moon, stars, night, day and the first man in whom Nyame breathed life. He showed humans how to plow and sow grain. His [Web of Life](#) inspired humans by showing them how to weave and how to construct houses. The web also showed human beings how to link themselves together in order to form a society. The web is also a symbol of the life-giving sun.

Anansi's mother is Nyame's wife, Asase Ya, the goddess of the Earth and of fertility. Anansi's first name, Kweku, means Wednesday. This day-name signifies that his soul first appeared on

that day. His mischief had infuriated Nyame one time too many and for this final transgression Nyame permanently turned his son into a small spider-man. From that time forward, Anansi the spider-man had to use his mental skills to survive. Undaunted by his fate, Anansi rose to become the "Keeper Of All Stories". He is the hero of children and the champion of the little guy and the powerless. Like them, he often gets in trouble and must use his intelligence to save himself.

Anansi's stories spread his fame among the Akan people of West Africa and their neighbors. In the Americas he was adopted by enslaved Africans from different ethnic groups. The variations in the spelling and pronunciation of his name reflects this cross cultural change from Akan into English, French, Dutch, creole and patois. These cultural exchanges also occurred between Africans and Europeans in the Americas. Separated from his Asanti origins for hundreds of years, his gender also changed in some locales because of the similarity in sound between *Ah-nancy* and the English name *Nancy*. However, the use of the term "Nancy story" did not necessarily imply a gender change and was just a shortening of the name Anansy.

Anansi stories are both entertaining and instructional. Listeners are sometimes advised either to follow Anansi's example or beware of his folly. So as not to upset a listener whose actions or personality may mimic Asansi's, a storyteller sometimes issues a disclaimer in telling a tale. Some stories include a proverb at the end or may incorporate a song. Anansi stories occur at various periods of his life. In one tale he may be a bachelor in search of a bride or the hand of the king's daughter. In another story he may have his wife Aso and his son Intikuma. In Jamaican

stories Intikuma is Takooma or Bra' Takooma. Anansi's wife may just be referred to as Mrs. Anansi or as "Cookie" in a 19th century account. Some traditional Asanti stories may refer to his children by name or by ability. Some Anansi tales may not include Anansi and others may be a "Why" or "How" story. For example, "Why Dogs Have Narrow Behinds", or "How John Crow (turkey vulture) Got a Peel (bald) Head."

A song from an AnansiStory



I - ya - a ya-o sa, nom-be, ya-o ya ya-o sa - a, nom-be,



a nom-be, sa-ka be-ne sa-bi-na, nom-be, ya ya-o sa, a, nom-be.

Turtle answer quite yonder, soft an' sweet,



I - ya - a ya-o sa-a, nom-be, ya-o sa ya-o sa - a, nom-be, se



sa-ka be-ne sa-bi-na, nom-be, ya ya-o sa-a, nom-be.

A song from the Animal Race story tradition, "Horse and Turtle". Told by Alfred Williams to Martha Warren Beckwith between 1919 and 1921 in Maroon Town, Cockpit Country, Jamaica. Mr. Williams, a Maroon song-leader, inherited the song's lyrics from his African ancestors. Jamaican Maroons originated from the ranks of the island's indigenous people, the Taino. Some Taino chose to remove themselves from the Spanish ranches that were established in Jamaica after Christopher Columbus' arrival there in 1494. The "wild" or "cimarron" Taino were later joined by African runaways after the English captured Jamaica in 1655. Today, Jamaican Maroons are predominantly of African descent many of whom originated among the Akan peoples of Africa's Gold Coast. Famous Jamaican Maroons like Captains Cudjoe (Kojo/Monday), Cuffee (Kofi/Friday), Quaco (Kwame/Saturday) and some enslaved Africans in 19th century sugar plantation accounts, also had Asanti day names.

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